At times an individual's personal duties come into direct conflict with his communal ones. The Torah relates to one such instance in this week's Parasha, where we are taught that a Chatan is exempt from military service: "If a man marries a new wife he shall not go to the army nor shall he be assigned to it for any purpose (LO YAAVOR ALAV L'CHOL DAVAR). He shall be free for his home for one year, and he shall gladden his wife whom he has married" (D'varim 24:5). [Rashi explains that the phrase LO YAAVOR ALAV L'CHOL DAVAR, which we translated as "Nor shall he be assigned to it for any purpose" - as referring to any army related matter. The Bi'ur understood ALAV as a reference to the Chatan himself: "The army official who passes among the houses of the individuals being conscripted for service, shall not go over to him (ALAV), for he is to be free from any obligation for the full year."]

Rashi stresses that the correct meaning of the words V'SIMACH ET ISHTO, is that 'he shall gladden his wife' - and not as some had understood - that the couple should be happy together. The Torah is directing the husband to see it as his duty to make his wife happy. This domestic commandment is of such importance that it trumps the collective responsibility to contribute to the national war effort.

The exemption from serving one's country is provided so that the Chatan may bring happiness to his new bride and focus on making his marriage work.

Rabbi SR Hirsch cogently remarks that "The national welfare can only be sought in the well-being and happiness of all single individuals. Hence, every flourishing and happy home is a contribution to the realization of the good set out for the nation." The chatan's marital focus truly benefits national security!

This understanding regarding the great importance of laying a sound and solid foundation for the home, leads to the Halacha that the new husband should not absent himself from his home even for work purposes during the first year of marriage.

The energy invested in solidifying the strength of the young couple's union
at its start, will yield much needed dividends in the years to come.

[HaGaon Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l] used to tell chatanim "The army exemption lasts one year... but the end of the verse: V'SIMACH ET ISHTO - the commandment to bring joy to his wife - this stands independently, and lasts a lifetime.]

As we proceed on to read the Torah's very next verse, we are jolted by the seeming incongruence between these two P'sukim. D'varim 24:6 reads: "One should not take the lower or upper millstone as security (for a loan) because it is like taking a life for security." What connection, if any, is there between this business-related directive and the army exemption granted to the new groom?

Chizkuni explains the connection thus: "After the chatan has been given permission to be at home (for the first year) he is instructed to avoid taking as collateral the millstones of those going off to war as it is as taking the man's life as a pledge." Once the Chatan has remained home - as one of the only able-bodied young men in the area his financial situation might allow him to be in a position to extend loans to those whose position might be less fortunate as the men of the household are off at war. Ultimately, a soldier's family might be left without livelihood during wartime. Rav Amnon Bazak quotes the words of Chizkuni, concluding as follows: "Even an individual who receives an exemption for participation in war must be careful not to use this exemption to benefit at the expense of another who is answering society's call to risk his life during the war effort."

This lesson can be relevant to other battlefield exemptions the Torah mentioned in Parshat Shoftim as well. Namely one entering into a new home; or beginning to benefit from the fruits of a new vineyard who are sent back from the battlefield.

This brings to mind the last exemption granted to the ISH HAYAREI V'RACH HALEIVAV - the fearful and weak-hearted person. Our Rabbis taught us that this verse refers to one who is worried about his sins, leading to the inevitable conclusion that the Torah intended the ranks of the Jewish army to be populated by the righteous and those who are most worthy spiritually.

This assumption, that a righteous person is the one who will fear nothing, and therefore is the most suitable to go off to do battle, is such a far cry from the situation we know today, where the Chareidi position is that it is their right to demand an
exemption from army service in order that they be allowed to maintain and safeguard their spiritual integrity.

The Minchat Chinuch in trying to find the common denominator to the three exemptions notes that the Torah grants the exemptions to those experiencing important transitional periods in their lives.

This comment is interesting as it leads us to one additional modern-day exemption: The exemption granted by the IDF to those coming on Aliyah. Aliyah is a major transition in one's life. It is easily on a par with a new home and vineyard, perhaps even with marriage as well. Therefore, it would seem that some of the laws applicable to the above would be applicable to the Oleh as well. Interestingly, as far as the requirements of army service, Tzahal provides Olim with a year of acclimation, only calling them to active army service at the end of this time period.

This is a beautiful example of how the juggling of personal and national needs in the modern State of Israel is inspired and informed by the words of the Torah.